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Considerations of cultural safety

White counselors and cross-cultural practice:
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Whakawhanaungatanga

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Whakawhanaungatanga = seeking connections



What influences shaped the cross-cultural practice of Pākehā (white) practitioners?

This presentation offers some insights gained through research conducted with highly experienced Pākehā (white) counselors in New Zealand

- each had a strong commitment to culturally appropriate practice.
- despite their experience and commitment, each faced significant discursive restraints in their practice.
- discourses of social justice both enabled and restrained their practice. This presentation focuses primarily on effects of a cultural safety discourse as well as rangitiratanga (independence/autonomy) and (cultural) partnership discourses

Underlying premises

- All counselling involves relations of power which must be addressed if practice is to be effective
- The greater the degree of cultural difference present, the more challenging it can be to address the power relations
- These power relations emerge through calls to take up positions offered by cultural (and other) discourses
- Some position calls enable, while others restrain effective practice
- When the counsellor is identified with a dominant cultural group they must address the power relations between them and their client with particular care

(Davies and Harré 1990, Davies, 1991)

Outline

- Research method
- A postcolonial context
- Considering some research texts
- Moments of identity
- A final research text
- Discussion

Research method

Conversation – text – discourse – deconstruction - praxis

- A recursive process
 - Meeting 1
 - Accounts of identity, practice; hopes & fears
 - Online reflection
 - Beginning to identify discourses
 - Meeting 2
 - Discourses & further accounts
 - Online reflection
 - Deconstruction continued, praxis emerged
 - Researcher only deconstruction and theorising

Postcolonial Aotearoa

- Colonisation began early 19th Century
 - 1840 Treaty of Waitangi
 - Division and dispossession
 - 1840s -
 - Assimilation
 - 1900s
 - Reconciliation and restitution
 - 1975 -

A postcolonial moment?

- What are the discourses which produce
 - Us as persons and practitioners?
 - Our practice?
 - Our clients and colleagues?
- Colonising discourse
 - Assimilation discourse
 - Postcolonial discourse

After Frankenberg (1993)

Postcolonial discourse

- Tino rangatiratanga
- Sovereignty
- Cultural safety
- (Treaty) Partnership

Tino rangatiratanga

“Māori as a relatively autonomous political community independently sourced with collective and inherent indigenous rights.”

“Māori rights to self-determining authority are inherent, originating from within Māori peoples themselves and are largely inalienable.”

(Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 103)

- A “staggering” variety and breath of applications of tino rangatiratanga from individual or group self-sufficiency to tribal autonomy

Sovereignty

Māori sovereignty (Awatere, 1984) argued that:

- The Māori version of the Treaty was the ruling version
- Māori sovereignty or rangatiratanga had not been extinguished by the signing of the Treaty.
- Colonial oppression was the sole cause of problems faced by Māori.
- Dialogue was possible only on Māori terms.

It was a call to secession (Awatere, 1984; Maaka & Fleras, 2005, p. 103) which distinguishes it from other understandings of tino rangatiratanga.

This discourse produced calls that only Māori could work with Maori

Cultural safety

“However competent any nurse or midwife may be technically, such skills and experience will not be of use if people do not feel emotionally safe to approach the service or if they approach it too late.

Only the patient is able to say whether the nurse is safe regardless of how many awareness courses the nurse has attended” (Ramsden, 1997, p. 121)

- Produced a discourse which enables and restrains practice

Discursive position calls

Colonisation

Counselling

Problem?

Assimilation

Cultural safety

Partnership

SOVEREIGNTY

Tino rangatiratanga

Marie – research texts 1

Marie shared a “fear” she may bring “*oppressive practices*” from her culture into counselling work with Māori clients. She was concerned that “*oppressive practices*” could lead to “*a sense of having power over somebody and that when that starts to happen the other person loses voice, loses agency*”.

Deconstruction

“Voice”, “agency” and “oppressive practices”

Could be consistent with:

- Counselling practice & discourse?
- A postcolonial stance that seeks to enact justice in relation to a history of colonisation?

Marie appears at once a potential coloniser who might deprive the other of “voice” or “agency” through exercising “power over” and also acting in relation to a “fear” of taking up such a positioning.

Marie – research texts 2

“For myself as a counsellor the hardest [thing] has been to reconcile the ideas about Māori working with Māori – what right do I have to work with Māori? That leads me to a very tentative way of working with Māori, which I think can be agentic for client and counsellor.”

- (Marie, research participant)

Deconstruction

Marie

- spoke the colonial texts of the dominant culture's “rights”,
- subverted these texts by speaking a postcolonial disputing of such rights: “*what right do I have?*”

Perhaps the disputing of rights carries an echo of Māori sovereignty discourse that argues “[only] *Māori work with Māori*”.

- Contesting of discourse continued as Marie appeared to decline this position call not to work with Māori.

Discussion

Marie has *neither* taken an essentialised position that *only* “Māori work with Māori”, nor that she has an essential right to work with Māori.

To work *tentatively* does not deny tino rangatiratanga.

Tentativeness appears to respond to cultural safety discourse.

- A very “tentative” way of working, she suggests, offers her client an “agentic” position from which, it seems reasonable to assume, the client is positioned to determine whether or not the counselling experience is culturally safe for her/him.
- Marie offers the idea of “agency” as something of a determinant of whether practice is culturally appropriate. Drewery writes of the possibilities and limitations of agency:

“Agentive positioning [offers us] the opportunity to negotiate meaning, and thus such positioning offers the opportunity to collaborate with others in the production of the future conditions of our lives.”

Discursive positioning

Colonisation

Counselling

Partnership

Problem?

Assimilation

Cultural safety

SOVEREIGNTY

Tino rangatiratanga

A postcolonial moment?

The position that Marie takes up is culturally and temporally relative.

- How might we understand such a position and such a moment?

Frankenberg (1993) linked whiteness, privilege and racial domination

- She analysed white identity in terms of three “moments” or discursive repertoires

The moment of essentialised, biologically based racism

- Acting in racist ways towards a racial other who has a fixed and limited identity

The moment of “color evasiveness” and “power evasiveness”

- Denying or rejecting **the** racism of the first moment *but*
- Not addressing the power relations central to the 1st moment and so those power relations persist in this moment.
- Not contributing to the dismantling of racist discourse and structures
- So contributing to the assimilation of minority cultures and the persistence of discrimination.

The moment of race cognizance

Acting

- from a recognition of the rights and wishes of “people of color” *and*
- with an understanding of the injustice of the power relations inherent in the first two moments.
- Seeking to enter and maintain a dialogue with the non-whites they encounter with the terms of the conversation being negotiated on terms that each of them can accept.

Moments of Pākehā identity

The moment of colonisation	Essentialised, biologically based racism
The moment of indifference and assimilation	Color and power evasiveness
The postcolonial moment	Race cognizance

Moments and positioning theory

- Each instant is produced by interaction of discourse and identity
- Discourses call us; offer us positions
- Some positions offer agency; others deny or offer limited agency
- Each position we take up produces a call to another
- We can aspire to a preferred moment; we may not always achieve it

Further texts

Marie spoke of some inter-agency groups

We've talked [in this group] about a fear of offence, but also...if we give offence then what does that do to a [professional] reputation? When there's been a lot bandied about around cultural safety and you know a fear for me of getting that label of being culturally unsafe keeps me from ever speaking up unless I know who I am speaking with and [I am] comfortable with the people.

Further texts

Anne responded to Marie

So it's built on a relationship? To actually say the hard things you've got to have that relationship with the person?

Deconstruction

Marie subject to very powerful calls from cultural safety discourse that restrained her speaking.

- Can cultural safety discourse can produce essentialised identities such as ‘culturally safe’ or ‘culturally unsafe’ practitioners?
- Might this restrain Marie as a Pākehā counsellor from “ever speaking up”?
- “Speaking up” becomes possible only in the context of knowing “who I am speaking with” and experiencing herself as “comfortable with the people”.
- What Marie’s “speaking up” might offer is unclear
 - just that fear of being known as “culturally unsafe” restrains her speaking.

Taking up the (Pākehā) postcolonial moment

- Involves Pākehā (white) vulnerability
- Draws on partnership discourse
- Acknowledges tino rangatiratanga
- Works for others & own cultural safety
- Always risks being seen as an earlier moment
- May involve being silent

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